

## Dialogue

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*An Interview with Alan Duff*

VILSONI HERENIKO

*Renée Heyum, Pacific Librarian and Bibliographer sans Pareil*

KAREN M. PEACOCK

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With the death of Renée Heyum, Pacific Curator Emerita of the University of Hawai'i Library, the world of Pacific scholarship lost one of its strongest supporters. Friends and colleagues, who relied on her incredible memory, her encyclopedic knowledge, and the marvelous collection to which she devoted much of her life, mourn the loss of a great lady. While many knew Renée, not all knew of the terrible struggles that she faced in her younger days.

Renée Heyum was born in Frankfort am Main, and she spent her early school years in Germany. Hitler's rise to power in 1933 convinced Renée's father that it would be wise to leave, and he gave up his career as a lawyer to become a hotel owner in Paris. When the Germans occupied Paris, Renée and her family faced the terrors of Nazi persecution. Renée ventured out without her yellow star to buy black market food, and on one such expedition was chased by the Gestapo. The brakes on her bicycle failed, and she fell, badly injuring her knee. Public hospitals did not take Jews, but she found treatment in a private nursing home, where the staff protected her when the Gestapo came round on its dreadful searches. The wartime lack of adequate medicine and food meant that her knee never healed properly and was to cause her lifelong pain. The next year, 1943, the Gestapo came to arrest her entire family, but after hiding in the cellar, the family escaped to the country to live with a French family who risked their lives to hide the Heyums.

After the Allied liberation of Paris in 1944, Renée cared for youngsters who had survived the concentration camps. In 1947 family duties called her to return to help with the hotel. Not until 1956, at the age of forty, was Renée able to fulfill her ambitions and earn her diploma in library science from the Ecole de Bibliothécaires of the Institut Catholique. As her first professional assignment, she compiled a bibliography on the nomads of the Sahara. In 1958 Renée began her long association with the



famous bibliographer and scholar Father Patrick O'Reilly. Working with Father O'Reilly on the *Bibliographie de l'Océanie* and the monumental *Bibliographie de Tahiti*, she embarked on an association with the islands of the Pacific that was to take her far from Paris.

In 1968 the University of Hawai'i Library began a search for a Pacific Curator. During travel to Europe, Hawaiian Curator Janet Bell met Renée Heyum, and after much hard work in creating a new Pacific Curator position, Ms Bell and Dr Norman Meller were successful in bringing Renée to Honolulu. Despite early battles to obtain a sufficient acquisitions budget, Renée began to build on the foundation laid by Ms Bell, and she worked

hand in hand with the Pacific Islands Program. In 1971 she made the first of many acquisitions trips sponsored by Pacific Islands Studies. In her travels Renée met island librarians, acquired government documents, and purchased locally published materials. Her fierce determination to acquire anything and everything related to the region soon became famous, as did her gifts of macadamia nuts and chocolates, the enticement for further donations to her beloved Pacific Collection.

During her tenure at the University of Hawai'i, Renée found her greatest satisfaction in working with students from the Pacific Islands. As the years passed, she would find many of these former students in high positions in the governments of their home islands, and they often eased her way in her search for documents because of their memories of the kind help so freely given in Honolulu. Renée always felt strongly that the records of the Pacific should be made available to the peoples of the Pacific, and she was a strong influence in the development of libraries in the region. She delighted in seeing more and more island authors appear in print. In a 1991 address to the Friends of the Library in Honolulu, Renée stated, "I am grateful for having been able to build a collection at a time in history when at last islanders themselves are writing the books and providing the resources."

By the time Renée retired in 1987, the Pacific Collection had become the major locus of library research for the region. The acknowledgments and dedications of numerous scholarly works noted the importance of her work. In his two-volume work, *Oceania: The Native Cultures of Australia and the Pacific Islands*, Douglas Oliver offered a tribute, "To Renée Heyum, bibliographer and curator, *sans pareil*, of writings in the Pacific." Scholars from Hawai'i, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and across the United States have echoed this thought in their recognition of Renée's role in their research.

In 1990 the government of France bestowed the order of merit on Renée, and she became a Chevalier de l'Ordre Nationale du Mérite. At its annual conference in Kona in 1993, the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania made Renée an Honorary Fellow. Among the anthropologists assembled for this event were three librarians who trained under her—University of California San Diego Melanesian Studies Librarian Kathy Creely, University of Hawai'i Pacific Specialist Lynette Furuhashi, and University of Hawai'i Pacific Curator Karen Peacock. Renée's legacy to the world of scholarship includes those whose lives and careers she

influenced, and for whom she became a role model—an example of excellence, devotion, and service.

On 18 January 1995, Renée's friends gathered in Honolulu for a memorial tribute to a gallant woman. The setting, overlooking the sunlit Ko'olau Mountains, would have delighted Renée, who deeply loved the islands of Hawai'i. The warm and loving words of praise for her life, the acknowledgments of her courage and her spirit, would have caused her to blush, but would have given her great pleasure. Among the many touching words spoken that day, it is perhaps most fitting to quote a message sent by Greg Dening, for his words reflect our admiration and affection for this amazing woman, who was both dear friend and honored colleague:

I am among many "from beyond the skies" of Hawai'i who would want to voice my love and admiration for Renée Heyum as you gather to celebrate her life. There isn't a day in my scholarly life in which she does not touch me somehow, directly and indirectly. But her friendship touched me more personally than that. Her courage humbled me. Her strong principles encouraged me. The pain in her body and in her life never crippled her spirit. She crossed her beaches in a remarkable way, retaining her French stylishness and blending it with island generosity. There will be many monuments to her in Hawai'i, but Hawai'i will never be the same without her.

Kaoha, Renée!

As I think over the events since Renée's death, the moments that bring the most comfort involve the small group who bid farewell to Madame on her last voyage. A canoe took Renée's ashes to their final resting place in the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean she loved. On that lovely day, the sun sparkled on the waters off Waikōkō, and a turtle swam alongside, while a flying fish skimmed the waves, just ahead of a pursuing barracuda. The Pacific welcomed home one of its own. Renée Heyum is now a part of the sea that cradles all of the islands, and each of us.

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RUTH RENÉE HEYUM, born 6 July 1916; *Diploma, Ecole des Bibliothécaires* (1956); *Elève titulaire, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (1968); *Chevalier de l'Ordre Nationale du Mérite* (1990); *Honorary Fellow, Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania* (1993); died 14 December 1994.